

Abrogation of One Ayah with another one

مَا نَنْسَخْ مِنْ آيَةٍ أَوْ نُنسِهَا نَأْتِ بِخَيْرٍ مِّنْهَا أَوْ مِثْلَهَا

2:106 Any message which, We annul or consign to oblivion We replace with a better or a similar one.

وَإِذَا بَدَّلْنَا آيَةً مَّكَانَ آيَةٍ 16:101

And now that We replace one message by another

Commentary:

The principle laid down in this passage - relating to the supersession of the Biblical dispensation by that of the Qur'an - has given rise to an erroneous interpretation by many Muslim theologians. The word ayah ("message") occurring in this, context is also used to denote a "verse;" of the Qur'an (because every one of these verses contains a message). Taking this restricted meaning of the term ayah, some scholars conclude from the above passage that certain verses of the Qur'an have been "abrogated" by God's command before the revelation of the Qur'an was completed. Apart from the fancifulness of this assertion - which calls to mind the image of a human author correcting, on second thought, the proofs of his manuscript - deleting one passage and replacing it with another - there does not exist a single reliable Tradition to the effect that the Prophet ever, declared a verse of the Qur'an to have been

“abrogated”. At the root of the so-called “doctrine of abrogation” may lie the inability of some of the early commentators to reconcile one Qur’anic passage with another: a difficulty which was overcome by declaring that one of the verses in question had been “abrogated”. This arbitrary procedure explains also why there is no unanimity whatsoever among the upholders of the “doctrine of abrogation” as to which, and how many, Qur’an verses have been affected by it; and, furthermore, as to whether this alleged abrogation implies a total elimination of the verse in question from the context of the Qur’an, or only a cancellation of the specific ordinance or statement contained in it. In short, the “doctrine of abrogation” has no basis whatever in historical fact, and must be rejected. On the other hand, the apparent difficulty in interpreting the above Qur’anic passage disappears immediately if the term ayah is understood, correctly, as “message”, and if we read this verse in conjunction with the preceding one, which states that the Jews and the Christians refuse to accept any revelation which might supersede that of the Bible: for, if read in this way, the abrogation relates to the earlier divine messages and not to any part of the Qur’an itself.

by substituting the message of the Qur'an for the earlier dispensations - and not, as some Muslim scholars maintain, "abrogating" one Qur'anic verse and replacing it by another.

It is not the change of the Quranic verses that is spoken of here; it is the change of the previous messages sent through former prophets for the message of the Holy Quran.

According to the Quran, the previous Laws were meant for particular peoples and for particular times. They were suited only to the requirements of the peoples for whom they were revealed. The Quran, on the other hand, constitutes a universal Law, meant for all peoples and all times, and therefore if it is found to contain certain teachings which differ from the teachings of previously revealed Scriptures, that is no evidence of the Quran's being a forgery. On the other hand, it is but natural and necessary that the perfect and universal Law—the Quran—should differ in some of its ordinances from temporary and provisional Laws previously revealed. It must be clearly understood that the verse contains no reference to the abrogation of any of the verses of the Quran.

The Holy Prophet has not been reported to have ever declared any verse of the

Quran to have been abrogated by another verse. Nor are there any verses in the Quran which clash with other parts of the Book and which may therefore have to be regarded as abrogated. All parts of the Quran support and corroborate one another. Moreover, there is nothing in the context to suggest any reference to the abrogation theory.

It is also worth remembering that the passage under comment was revealed in Mecca. In fact, the whole Surah belongs to the Meccan period. And the Surahs of the Meccan period deal with teachings pertaining to morals and matters of belief, and about these there can be no question of abrogation or revocation.